

Specific Recommendations from
The Catholic religious trustees of Northern Ireland
To
The Independent Strategic Review of Education
September 2006

1. The Shared Future proposals represent one element of Government policy. All educational proposals should ensure that they promote the Government's educational priorities, as enunciated in a series of Reports such as Burns, Costello. The criteria and core principles agreed in such Reports should be considered and integrated insofar as possible within the terms of reference of this current Report. Lack of integrated approaches can be misleading, as the absence of joined-up thinking does not promote either a healthy or an efficient system.

2. Economic considerations alone cannot inform educational policy, school provision decisions and pupil outcomes.

3. The choice of a specifically faith-based education remains open to young people in all areas of NI. This option should be facilitated, not as a minority interest, but a core element of educational provision.

4. There is need for an independent School Provision Body to be established, independently of the proposed Educational Services Authority, as proposed under the PRA Review. The ESA as the owner/direct provider of 43% of schooling (controlled sector) would lack the desired level of credibility to avoid perceptions of 'vested' interest in the matter of making ultimate decisions about school provision, notwithstanding the existence of transparent criteria and protocols for any provision.

5. The current educational scene, which is under review locally and regionally, should be encouraged to develop organically from where it is. School Bodies with an existing track record of responsible strategic planning and high quality outcomes should be supported and their experience not wasted. These current providers should continue to have the authority and the resources to develop proposals for rationalisations/ new developments subject to agreed criteria and transparent processes. The School Provision Body above would have the final decision making powers according to agreed criteria which would include processes of consultation and appeal procedures.

Such agreed processes should include inter alia:

- ❖ any new development or rationalisation proposal should ensure that the school body/sector in question should, at an early stage, confer with other school bodies/sectors in the same area.
- ❖ Collaborative approaches in the sharing of facilities and resources between school bodies/sectors should be normative while

ensuring that the particular identity or ethos of an individual school is preserved. Such collaboration refers to Trustees/owners, Governors, Principals. Such coherent approaches would promote the development of a healthy, efficient system as well as being a force for mutual understanding and tolerance.

6. Schools in local communities are an essential asset in

- ❖ Helping to educate, support and socialise children;
- ❖ Promoting stability; and
- ❖ Encouraging life-long learning.
- ❖ Developing tolerance, positive self-esteem and reconciliation.

Schools alone cannot achieve these objectives. Therefore in addition to the work pursued by schools, other agencies should also do everything possible should be done to promote, retain and sustain economically viable, healthy, confident communities.

7. The 1989 Educational Reform Order requirement for Government to 'promote and facilitate 'integrated education'. In this context specific support should be given to **all** schools that:

- ❖ given their environment, work towards making educational facilities increasingly accessible across the population of NI;
- ❖ despite their environment, continue to work to build community and develop links across the many divides that mark this society.

8. Every effort should be made to ensure that structures and systems introduced in the proposed community audits prevent the politicisation of educational decisions.